

Summary Notes

2002 Regional WIA Reauthorization Forums

Kansas City, MO Forum

April 30, 2002

The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration scheduled a series of public forums in March - May 2002 to hear comments on issues related to the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). A public forum was held in Kansas City, Missouri on April 30, 2002 at the Kansas City Marriott Downtown as the pre-conference session for the ETA Region's annual Heartland Conference. A total of 107 participants attended and ten participants made comments. Also in attendance were representatives from the ETA Division of One-Stop Operations (National Office), the ETA Region V Office, and Technical Assistance and Training Corporation (TATC).

The session was introduced as follows:

- **Welcome and Introductions**
Byron Zuidema, Region V Administrator
Employment and Training Administration

Gary Allen, Team Administrator
Administration for Children and Families, Region V
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- **Overview of Reauthorization Issues and Process**
Mason Bishop, Special Advisor to the Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration
- **Explanation of Public Comment Process**
Cheryl Martin, TATC Facilitator

Cheryl Martin moderated the public comment session that followed. Pre-registered speakers were invited to present their comments first. Nine speakers presented oral comments, some of whom submitted written comments to supplement their presentations. The summary below considers only the comments recorded during the forum. Written comments will be summarized in the final report to be submitted at a later date.

Comments are categorized according to the topics in the *Discussion Guide on WIA Reauthorization Issues*:

- I. Business Engagement
- II. Governance / State Flexibility
- III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs
- IV. One-Stop Career Centers
- V. Unemployment Insurance / Employment Service Reform and the One-Stop System
- VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

In addition, participants were asked, “If you could change one thing about WIA, what would it be?”

I. Business Engagement

- NAWB held business forums. At one forum, attendees said they didn’t know where the career centers were and didn’t like to get referrals from them because the workers were not qualified. We used that as a opportunity to work with business. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- My organization is involved in the H1B program. It was hard to figure out how to use it, but it is now an important resource for incumbent worker training and employer engagement. *Local WIB Member*
- Design a workforce development system that is truly demand-driven, with employers in the driver’s seat. *State Government*

Business Role on Workforce Investment Boards

- Business people are reluctant to take time away from work, especially to attend meetings. We need to go to business instead of waiting for them to come to us. *Local WIB Member*
- WIBs need to constantly invite employers to get involved. To keep them, keep WIB meetings short and to the point. The worst case example is WIB meetings consisting of nothing but staff reports. *Local WIB Member*
- We need to transform the workforce system’s image, culture, and philosophy. Our private-sector Board chairs understand the importance of having a vision that is clearly understood by everyone to achieve performance. We need to have the vision of a world-class system. The vision needs to reflect the current realities of our economy: business-driven, customer-oriented, performance-based, agile, and responsive to changing labor market needs. *State Government*

II. Governance / State Flexibility

Employer Engagement in Workforce Investment System

- Not everyone involved in WIA is forward-looking. Some in state government see WIA as a new label for JTPA and private sector involvement as a fad. These bureaucrats have ignored, insulted, stonewalled, and yelled at business leaders and ignored WIA requirements for state governments to cooperate with Local Areas. They are not equipped to take the workforce into next week, let alone the next century. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*

Flexibility and Concerns Regarding Funding

- Make statewide set-aside money available for Local WIBs for innovative approaches to service design. *Local WIB Member*
- All workforce delivery is local. Service delivery, coordination, and integration will be something to just talk about but not actually do, until Local Boards have the authority to commit all funds under all WIA titles. *Local WIB Member*
- Give greater flexibility to reallocate WIA funds among local regions. The low expenditure problem varies widely between regions. High-performing regions should be rewarded with additional funds from low-performing regions. *State Government*
- Require full and public accounting of WIA funds in each state. States typically divide WIA funds among several agencies that don't report how the money is used. This forces Local Areas to plan in a "black hole." *Local WIB Member*
- We strongly oppose the previous rescissions and recommend reinstating future WIA funding to the pre-rescission levels. *State Government*
- Provide for a hold-harmless process to distribute dislocated worker funds among states and regions. Cyclical funding strategies don't react quickly enough to meet workers' needs. National Emergency Grants are a better way than formula funding to respond to mass layoffs. *State Government*

Balancing State and Local Administration of the System

- WIA was very flexible at the beginning, but as the federal government took more control over the states, the states took more control over the locals. We need to keep the system flexible and focused on the Local Areas, where innovation happens. *Local WIB Member*
- WIA provided a floor of funding and expectations, not a ceiling, to allow Local Boards to use resources creatively and make rapid changes. *Local WIB Member*
- The federal government hasn't done enough to help states make the transition to WIA. *Local WIB Member*
- We oppose our Governor's intention of placing WIA under a TANF superwaiver, which would pull workforce development out of our local private-sector hands, contrary to the guiding principles of WIA. *Local WIB Member*
- We believe in local control, but there needs to be some statewide and national consistency, e.g., portable credentials that allow individuals to move from one place to another. *State Government*
- Local WIBs are responsible for bringing together all the workforce systems in their area. But we do need State Boards to coordinate all Local Areas since they are different. What works in one area does not always work in another. There must be some consistencies between the State and Local Boards and someone has to see that the regulations are implemented. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*
- The new workforce development system must be built on the premise of structuring opportunities and incentives for innovation and excellence, not living by regulations and

mandates as in the past. Agility, innovation, flexibility and responsiveness must become paramount. Build the system from the customer up, not from the top down. *State Government*

Workforce Investment Boards' Role and Membership

- Restructure State Boards. State Boards should consist of only Local WIB chairs. *Local WIB Member*

General Comments Regarding Flexibility and Governance

- WIA hasn't been operating for even three years in many places. We need time to incubate, experiment, make mistakes, and correct them. In the private sector, businesses usually take 3-5 years to research, develop, and test new ideas and give them a chance to work. This doesn't seem to be the approach in WIA, where mistakes are seen as structural failures. *Local WIB Member*

III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs

Partnership

- Engage state and local economic development and education entities as full partners with State and Local Workforce Boards. *State Government*
- We need stronger coordination between TANF, WIA, and educational systems. *State Government*
- We don't see a need to mandate cooperation. It will happen if the barriers are removed by common performance measures, etc. But the federal-level agencies need to find that common ground. We are surprised they don't have MOUs that would serve as models for state and local partners. *State Government*

Developing "Commonalities"

- Goals and performance measures for both TANF & WIA should be consistent, with common definitions and complementary eligibility requirements. Standardization of performance goals is essential. We feel that outcomes are better gauges of performance than TANF's process-oriented measures. Greater federal collaboration should be required. *State Government*
- Transform the workforce investment system alignment at all levels, including accountability, funding mechanisms, and management. It is hard to be told to collaborate when it's really not occurring. We would appreciate more agencies working together to break down silos. We recommend perhaps establishing a federal oversight board or task force with a strong majority of employers along with representation from the federal partners (Labor, Commerce, Education, HUD, HHS, etc.). We want this group to replace bureaucratic, agency-specific performance measures with meaningful accountability measures that will show return on investment and promote continuous improvement. *State Government*

- Our UI agency has always worked with the local workforce areas when possible. But UI has unique regulations that restrict sharing our information. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*

WIA-TANF Linkages

- We completely support linkages with TANF. Turf issues are too often an obstacle within the Beltway. We need to combine services seamlessly to help customers. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- TANF recipients are important customers of the workforce development system, which is a critical resource for them as they strive for self-sufficiency. To end fragmentation and ensure excellence in service delivery, TANF customers should be served in local One-Stops. *Local WIB Member*
- We support block grants with much closer ties between TANF and WIA, which serve many of the same clients. *State Government*
- We recommend mandatory partnerships between TANF and WIA operating entities. Welfare is supposed to be temporary under welfare reform to move families to self-sufficiency. We need to continue this evolution by partnering TANF with the workforce system as the most logical and efficient system. This would bring TANF recipients into the mainstream. *State Government*
- We need strong integration between TANF and WIA. There ought to be a better way to integrate than in a de facto “post” manner. *Local WIB Member*

Job Retention and Advancement

- The constantly changing needs and demands of this system are radically different from any experience to date. Outdated approaches are simply not working to address today’s changing needs. The system must provide every individual the opportunity to advance and address the skill needs of every employer. *State Government*
- Actively promote lifelong learning, re-skilling and upgrading the workforce. We need to make sure that individuals have “portable” credentials (that have some consistency across the nation). *State Government*
- I am a former welfare recipient who got out of public assistance because of entrepreneurial training, which has not been emphasized or utilized to its full potential. Small businesses are still the creators of the most jobs. If economic independence is the goal, we need to teach people entrepreneurial skills. Since this is now an allowable activity in TANF, this gives States and locals the opportunity to craft programs that build income in more ways than just getting a job. *One-Stop Partner: Welfare-to-Work*

Access to Other Supports

- States and localities need money for non-cash assistance, such as child care and transportation, despite shrinking caseloads. Strengthen these work supports that allow recipients to remain employed. For example, businesses lose up to \$4 billion a year to absenteeism due to child care problems, according to the Welfare-to-Work Partnership.

Employers, especially small businesses, cannot address all these challenges on their own.
State Government

IV. One-Stop Career Centers

Challenges to Integrating Services

- The value of career centers is service integration. But we need to integrate budgets in order to serve people in a seamless, customer-friendly manner. It's not anyone's fault, but different agencies' accounting systems and audit standards are a problem. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- Improve One-Stops and their funding. Cost sharing is difficult and can create divisions rather than partnerships. *State Government*
- We had to put in place almost five different MIS systems within our organization due to confidentiality issues and a lack of information sharing systems. At the state level, workforce programs and unemployment insurance are in two different agencies. This creates a challenge in sharing information—we can't even verify a job placement until six months later. That does not enable us to benchmark performance adequately. *Local WIB Member*

Access for Persons with Disabilities

- We need national guidance on serving customers with disabilities and working with Vocational Rehabilitation. Persons with disabilities are the group with highest unemployment rate in the country, yet they are also the group with the most firewalling in terms of information sharing. *Local WIB Member*

Workforce Development System as the "Single Access Point"

- One-Stops are an excellent system but need improvement. One-Stops need to be the presumptive deliverer of services. *Local WIB Member*

Labor Market Information

- Overhaul the labor market information (LMI) systems at the state and federal levels to be more current, user-friendly, and effective at providing quality data and analysis to make good business and career decisions. *State Government*

V. UI / ES Reform and the One-Stop System

- We support the proposed reforms. In my State, Unemployment Insurance and the Employment Service are in different agencies. We are leading an effort to make sure people don't just come in for a UI check, but also get help looking for jobs. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- The Unemployment Insurance and the Employment Service should be privatized under the direction of a statewide consortium of Local WIBs. State bureaucracies are obsolete in an

era of instant communication and customer service. Local tolerance for government foot-dragging has reached its limit. *Local WIB Member*

- My Governor and I do not support UI reform proposal in its current version because it would hurt our state in the long term. Reducing taxes looks great on the front end but seven years down the road, state general revenues would not be enough to make up for it. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*
- UI has to be there to pay people quickly. That was the reason for doing call centers. Our state was one of first four to receive federal emergency UI funds, and we paid our first check within two weeks after that. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*

Employer Services

- UI needs to be brought into the fold. There is a general misconception that UI and ES are separate programs, even when they're in the same building. The UI program does much more than unemployment insurance. We also do tax refund interception for child support, collect employer contributions, get employer input for what they want done in the program (how they want taxes collected and unemployed people treated, etc.). We need to look at new and innovative programs for disbursing unemployment. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*
- Employers want to be able to pay their FUTA taxes on-line. They also want random audits done to see that their people go back to work. They want people to go on UI less and for a shorter time because they don't want to pay those taxes. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*

VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

- Encourage greater access to WIA training. *State Government*

Training Funds

- Adequately fund employment and job training services. Even though there have been a lot of layoffs recently, we still have growing skill shortages. *State Government*

Adult Programs

Sequence of Services and "Work-First" Policies

- Remove unnecessary obstacles to training. In a knowledge-based economy, training is essential for providing a continuum of skills development, ranging from initial preparation to ongoing career advancement. Training enrollment must not be blocked by the application process or tiers of service, particularly when a One-Stop partner has already properly determined the need for training. *State Government*
- Employers feel that more needs to be done to prepare welfare recipients for success before work. They are not well served by strict "Work-First" policies. We need incentives and support to include education and training. *State Government*

Eligible Training Providers (ETPs) and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)

- Revise or eliminate the service provider certification process. It limits opportunities for participants. Providers who serve small numbers may find the process too involved to be of value, so they opt out. *State Government*

Youth Programs

- It is important to teach entrepreneurial skills in youth programs. *One-Stop Partner: Welfare-to-Work*
- Strong integration between WIA youth programs and TANF is needed. Our area has an increasingly young TANF population: 40% of recipients are under age 25. In our area, the children of teen moms have teen dads, 80% of whom have not completed high school. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*

Youth Councils

- Strengthen Youth Councils and ties to HHS, especially to HHS' recent work on youth development indicators. There should also be stronger ties to education and to community participation in youth work. *State Government*

Top-Priority Changes to WIA

- Change the information program so that everyone would have access to the same information. We have a good system in our workforce areas. *State One-Stop Partner: Unemployment Insurance*
- Under the current performance measures, which are all tied to education, we are discouraged from serving Out-of-School Youth who are also younger youth (age 16-17). Dropouts at this age have little interest in education, even a GED; they just want jobs. Older dropouts have gained more wisdom by age 19 and are more willing to enter education & training. *Local One-Stop Partner: Youth*

Other Issues

Performance Measures

- Develop a streamlined and simplified yet strong and meaningful WIA performance measurement and accountability framework that is based on state and local input. The current data collection requirements impede efficient service delivery. Some of the current performance measures are not even understood. We need practical, down-to-earth performance measures of things that are really happening. *State Government*

TANF Reauthorization

- We need full funding of TANF and supportive services, with adjustments for increases in the cost of living and funding for unexpected economic downturns. *Local WIB Member*

- Funds for skill upgrades and post-placement support are needed to provide opportunities for advancement. *Local WIB Member*
- Implement outcome-based performance measures to measure and improve retention and wage gains. *Local WIB Member*
- Require state TANF plans to reflect coordinated planning with One-Stop centers and Local WIBs. *Local WIB Member*
- Require that the Local WIBs have an approval process in the state TANF plan. *Local WIB Member*
- Require as a condition of a state receiving TANF funds a signed MOU from Local WIBs describing how TANF customers will be served in One-Stop centers and how TANF funds will be allocated to provide services. *Local WIB Member*
- Management of information must include data sharing at One-Stop centers—privacy waivers need to be incorporated into the TANF reauthorization so that the One-Stops can accept and share TANF data. *Local WIB Member*
- Maintain TANF block grants and allow for inflation. *State Government*
- States should have greater discretion in defining work activities, e.g., to combine work, education, training, and substance abuse treatment. *State Government*
- TANF performance measures tend to emphasize process and customer engagement. The President's proposal continues TANF's process focus, e.g., increased work activity requirements. We feel that outcomes are better gauges of performance. *State Government*
- In our Local Area, TANF work experience is a problem. We need to emphasize quality experiences. Packing boxes for non-profits fulfills work hour requirements, but what does a welfare recipient really learn from that? *One-Stop Partner: Welfare-to-Work*
- There are businesses that want to partner with the workforce development system. But when these employers ask to be a TANF work experience site, they have been told that there is no money. I thought there is both paid and unpaid Work Experience. Even if there is no money available for paid work experience, the TANF recipients still have to meet their work hour requirements. There should be clarity on what is most important: paid work experience, unpaid work experience, or work experience in general. *One-Stop Partner: Welfare-to-Work*

Non-Custodial Parents / Fatherhood

- WIA and TANF should promote services to non-custodial parents (NCPs). My state has a successful partnership in Welfare-to-Work (WtW) between the workforce and child support systems which benefits both TANF and WIA. Its success is jeopardized by the phase-out of WtW. NCPs can be served under WIA, but there is no direct promotion of such services under WIA or TANF. Greater child support and parental involvement benefit children. Increased support for NCPs would also put them in a better position to meet the Administration's goals of promoting marriage. *State Government*